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INTERVIEW WITH POET  
JOEL OPPENHEIMER

EXCERPTS  
FROM THE  
DIARY  
OF  
COLIN  
WILSON

THOREAU:  
A MALE  
CHAUVINIST PIG?  
by RACHEL  
DEITSCH  
SANDMAN

# THE NOISELESS SPIDER

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Vol. I No. II

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## Statement of Editorial Policy

The editorial board of *The Noiseless Spider* agrees with Henry Miller that the pangs of birth relate not to the body but to the spirit. It was demanded of us to know love, experience union and communion, and thus achieve liberation from the wheel of life and death. But we have chosen to remain this side of Paradise and to create through art the illusory substance of our dreams. In a profound sense we are forever delaying the act. We flirt with destiny and lull ourselves to sleep with myth. We die in the throes of our own tragic legends, like spiders caught in our own web.

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### \$50 PRIZE WINNER

Peter J. Moore's *Supermarket worker* is the recipient of this issue's award for the best literary work submitted by a student to be published in *THE NOISELESS SPIDER*. Runners-up in no special order are: *Oh Lone Ranger* by Tom Peterson, *A Eulogy is Not for You* by Tony Crocamo, *Mr. Johnson Let His Wife Keep the House and Children* by Alice Tucker, ½ by Wally Swist, and *Paranoia* by Alvin Fritz.

## Interview with Poet Joel Oppenheimer



*On December 10, 1971, the UNH English Club and the editorial staff of The Noiseless Spider invited the well-known poet Joel Oppenheimer to give a reading from his published works at the University of New Haven. The remarks which follow were made by Oppenheimer in the course of three separate exchanges on that day. The Noiseless Spider takes full responsibility for the accuracy with which the various strands of the poet's conversational web were later woven together.*

*Spider:* May we begin by offering you a dynamite cup of our English Club coffee?

*Oppenheimer:* Great. I could use something liquid after the drive up here.

*Spider:* It's not terribly good, unfortunately. One of the girls cleaned the percolator the other day (for the first time since September) and our java has lost some of its zing!

*Oppenheimer:* That'll suit me fine. I'm on the wagon, anyway. Not too much zing will be just the thing . . .

*Spider:* We realize this is your first actual visit to this campus, but in a sense you've been here many times before.

*Oppenheimer:* I have?

*Spider:* Yup. That is, your *poems* have been on this campus many times. For instance, Donald M. Allen's famous anthology *The New American Poetry*, which contains a generous selection of your poems, has been used in a couple of courses here in recent years. So has Walter Lowenfels' *Poets of Today*. Joel Oppenheimer is hardly a stranger around here.

*Oppenheimer:* Well, now I know why the mud-turtle green of these walls looked vaguely familiar . . .

*Spider:* Tell us about some of your favorite writers. Norman Mailer has been going around for some years boasting that he intends to KO the champ, Hemingway, right out of the ring. Who do you consider the champ in the sphere of American poetry these days?

*Oppenheimer:* Well, I can only speak of the poets who matter to me personally. Norman's lively metaphor is not so easy to apply to poetry. As for the domain of prose, I think Norman himself is uncontestably the champ at the moment. Nobody in America is doing so many things so well as he in prose today. He's a fantastic talent! I find myself disagreeing with a lot of the things he says and does, but nobody even approaches him as a prose stylist. As for the poets, I would say that those who matter most are people like Bob Creeley and Paul Blackburn and Ed Dorn. I've learned a great deal from Charles Olson, of course—for years and years he was my master, my god!

*Spider:* What about Denise Levertov? She's an important talent of the Black Mountain group also, isn't she?

*Oppenheimer:* Denise is a very nice girl. And of course she's been indefatigable in her opposition to the Vietnam war . . . [Roguish pause].

*Spider:* And Sylvia Plath? Many of the students here regard her very highly.

*Oppenheimer:* It's true that Sylvia had an extraordinary talent, but what she wrote was British and not American. Her poems are strictly mandarin poems—highly finished pieces, rather brittle in form, entirely “English” in their treatment of the language. Everyone speaks of the terrible risks she took during that prolific, white-heat phase at the end. But actually, the greatest risk of all (as I see it) she never took. I mean the risk of using language as a spoken, “unfinished,” on-going thing. You get the feeling while reading her work that each poem is utterly “composed,” both in its subject and in its language. She's of the school of Henry James and Eliot—brilliant, I admit—but poets like myself are more responsive to the example of Williams and

Pound. Particularly Williams and the incredible things he did to make the American idiom available to poetry.

*Spider:* Quite a number of us have been reading Williams' *Paterson* lately. How would you rank that book as a contender for the championship?

*Oppenheimer:* Not very high. Of course, it's a marvelous book and it contains some terrific passages! But I think it's in his short lyrics—particularly some of the "spoken" lyrics in *The Collected Earlier Poems* and *Pictures from Brueghel*—that Bill really is at his most brilliant. Frankly, I think he only wrote *Paterson* to show Pound he could do it *too*! Pound's *Cantos* was not the best kind of model for a poet like Bill to follow. Pound's lyrics, on the other hand, are largely failures in my opinion. I think *The Cantos* is Pound's most characteristic and most successful work, while his shorter poems are less important. With Williams, it's the other way around. It's the shorter poems that strike me as main-line Williams, while *Paterson* is a magnificent and futile failure. It seems to me largely wasted effort for a poet like Williams (such as whiz at ensnaring the human voice on the wing!) to labor on that kind of a long Kulchur poem. I think poets should concentrate on what they can do best.

*Spider:* That's logical.

*Oppenheimer:* Oh, I'm logical. If there's anything I really dig, it's logic. I believe with Aristotle (or was it Krishna-murti?) that everything should have a proper beginning, middle, and end. A friend of mine, incidentally, says that every human life has a kind of logic: it consists of "a beginning, a muddle, and an end." I thought that was good enough to put in a poem. The "muddle" is one of my favorite themes.

*Spider:* What do you think of Allen Ginsberg as a writer?

*Oppenheimer:* You know, for years Allen's writing has been a problem to me. I've had the greatest affection for Allen as a man all along, but for a long time I think I underestimated his achievement *on the page*! Allen's a fantastic reader, as everyone knows. If ever I had any doubts about

any of his poems, all I needed was to hear Allen read them aloud for all of my doubts to be dispelled immediately. Much of his poetry has to be *heard* to be appreciated. He belongs to a bardic oral tradition that goes back centuries before Homer! But lately my eyes have opened up to his marvelous structures as well. He looks better than ever on the printed page. I think he's one of our best writers.

*Spider:* Are there any single poems among your own works that you like more than the rest?

*Oppenheimer:* Well, I'm fond of the William Carlos Williams elegy that I read aloud a while ago. And I still like an early lyric called "The Bath," despite the fact that the Women's Libbers always say it could only have been written by a male chauvinist pig. I don't think it was. I think they say that because many Women's Lib types simply don't know how to read. But actually the poem I like most is always the one I'm about to finish, the one I'm working on at the moment.

*Spider:* Have you got any plans for an ambitious long work at the moment?

*Oppenheimer:* As a matter of fact, I'm at work on a novel in which the entire action takes place in a bar. There are a number of characters in it who (mainly) talk. One of them is half-Indian, half-white; another is part-Jewish, part-Gentile. They talk and talk, mostly about the problems of growing up in a country like this which people like them would have to face. I rather like the characters. (Long pause.) As for me, I *still* haven't decided what I want to be when I grow up . . .

*Spider:* Well, whatever it is, we have a feeling it will be worth reading about and we hope you'll consider coming back to tell us all about it. It's been a treat talking with you, Joel.

*Oppenheimer:* Thank you. You know, I like it here. I liked it very much. The kids made me feel very much at home. But would someone please do me the favor of pointing out the nearest Little Boys' Room to me? After all that hot coffee, I've gotta go badly!



## A Eulogy Is Not For You

*(for Joel Oppenheimer)*

I was hungry when you came  
(having never seen the farm)  
and to me you looked old

There were words  
to let us in  
then you told some poems  
while your foot bounced.

I ate half your egg-salad sandwich  
(it only made me hungrier)  
when you left  
to me you looked a poet

— *Tony Crocamo*



## Scattered People

Scattered people, sitting silently, listening to incantations on high. Removing the chalice the holy father turns to bless the cup, water to wine, wine to body and blood; Christ takes the last step barring his destiny. People rise and begin to move towards the altar. Hands cupped, folded in silent reverence. From the back, running late, an old woman rushes cautiously to the front of the altar. A broad hooked nose and shaggy eyebrows peer through her darkness. Hands pocketed not in prayer, she kneels. While reciting directions of thought and prayers, he places the host upon her lips. She stands, facing the priest, draws a gun aimed at the head of the church. With the butt of the gun she knocks down the priest and leaps over the rail. While the unholy woman calls out for all to assemble beneath the pulpit, a torrential flow of blood emanates from the river-head onto the tessellated floor. Her gun taunting the brave and her intrepid gaze transfixing the complacent, we all assemble. Her sermon begins.

“My children, for all are my children, *listen!* There lies your god dead for he never lived. He lived in the minds of those who impregnated your minds with him. Children let me explain the circumstances leading to Jehovah’s conception. There was a time when women ruled the earth. Their rule was traditional, unchallenged. Man challenged this tradition. A battle waged, the battle lost, man overcame his submissiveness. A Patriarchal society superseded the Matriarchal society. The women leaders and elders were banished from the land. They could not return for they would not submit to Man’s rule. In secret conclave the women elders sat. The council began to debate whether another attack should be ventured. The Eldest spoke: ‘No, my children, next time Man’s justice might not be so lenient. We are alive, we could be worse off. Better to live outside of Man’s domination, I have a plan. Man speaks of freedom, democracy. His subjects are free to choose as they please. Tonight I shall steal into their camp, under cover of darkness and seduce the foolish people into choosing freely the fruit of my wisdom.’ Darkness arrived and the Old Woman ap-

peared at Man's encampment. Only seven days before a battle waged and a kingdom lost. Now all is quiet beneath a moon hallowed by the clouds. She entered the woodland, following a path she knows well, leading to a secluded cottage. The brightly lit cottage, encircled by woods, mirrored the moon. The Hag approached the door with caution and knocked. She was greeted by a young woman. The Maid, clad in nightclothes and cap, urged the old woman inside, for the hour was late and the night air cold. The crone seated herself beside the maiden. The fire, which had caused the brilliant effect from the outside, dwindled as she neared her seat. The wood whistled a steady tune as the flame wove a weblike trance over the girl. They talked and the Hag poisoned the Maid with the fruit of her knowledge. She left as she came, cloaked by darkness."

The church echoes her voice, groaning, moaning, mocking me. Her lips move, but her words slide past.

I see the world — begin,  
I see the world — end,  
My mind wonders close behind.  
It's here — It's here — It's gone.

I dream — I sleep — I dream,  
I sense — I feel — I think, my mind no longer wonders  
I see.

I hurdle the rail; her gun taunting, her eyes blaze, I meet her gaze. She drops the gun, I pocket it, she flees the temple.

— A. Zaglauer



*Wanderjahr*

When the wind dies down  
We will catch a rail  
And stop hiding in cathedrals

Standing in cold wet boots  
Looking at cannon trails in the snow  
Where barbed-wire fences separate the seasons

In Telegraph square  
Where an epileptic frog sells newspapers  
I don't want you to get lost  
Nor in the cold halls overgrown with bookmarkers

Looking for our friend in the fallen rain  
We found truth dead in an alley around the corner  
Heading for the Sea of Senses  
Past the howling dogs  
And the pretentious false starts

Great smoking piers, stone tenemented shelled  
Through greenhouse wards of old coughing people  
twisted in pale sheets

They are outside lying and waiting  
In the yard beyond the pools  
"Canton don't want to look at anything"  
"Not even the hangman in the elevator"

The Great Western Steam packet sails  
Across the allancing waters  
Under steel girders that shake  
From the following waves

What a night it was when they were calling  
out all the friends of the air  
and voices dimmed out each other  
like the cough of a cold gear. . . . .

— John M. Grudzien



To touch through cotton candy  
sticky

    messy  
sweet but  
    no substance

I cry for meat  
for flesh

— *Michael W. York*

## Oh Lone Ranger

Oh Lone Ranger, how I feel for you now.

Once you were the proud masked man,  
laced in silver bullets, guns and spurs,  
riding the thirsty trails into frontier towns  
filled with three-fingered peddlers, whores and death.

But the powerful paws of enterprise dug deep,  
scooping out high rises, fords and profit,  
and now you stand sheepishly before the camera's eye,  
reduced to selling pizza rolls and aqua velva.

Oh Lone Ranger, how I feel for you now.

— *Tom Peterson*

## Father

### I

Dying

It wasn't getting old  
that bothered my father  
but getting dead,  
the reverse labor  
caught on the way out  
surviving between two existences  
paralyzed and dumb with sorrow  
trying all night after night  
to fall asleep  
by counting the oxygen bubbles.

### II

Death

Suddenly death  
is going to be quick,  
and the doctors, relieved  
to close their books and  
soon your eyes,  
call me across big America,  
and I'm trying to get there  
on the slow spin of a plane,  
    I love you  
    I love you  
    I love you down  
to the stones, how death takes  
the poetry out of things, stones  
that forget the useable parts of the dead,  
the illegible scars,  
  
the forsythia blooms bend to read.

— *Alvin Fritz*

Ephraim Carter died hereabouts  
On November Fourth Seventeen  
Hundred Ninety Six AD  
So says the stone  
Gray cold and detached  
The stone doesn't give a damn about  
Ephraim  
Neither does anybody else  
That's the way it goes, Ephraim

I'm probably the last person in the  
world to know where Ephraim Carter  
Is buried. Rest in pieces E.C.  
There's an interstate going through in the  
Spring—then even the stone will be buried.

— *Robert G. Finley*



## Genesis 1:

The sea is not always eating the land:  
Not all tides come in to feast on the shore.  
There are shallow coves, thick with weed and sand,  
Where the tide plies mildly its routine chore.

In such coves, children and the gulls can play  
Safely at the feet of the rising tide;  
For the ocean here does not bear away,  
But brings fresh silt to the continent's side—

As if building with another coast's loss,  
Intent on preserving its child, the land.  
But the shore's rocks, though slick with peaceful moss,  
Know that this is not always how things stand:

In even the quiet coves, there are times  
When the tide comes seething in, not at ease.  
It ravenously attacks the gray slimes,  
Pulling its soil-gift back into the seas.

At such tides there are no breakers, no white:  
The rising surface is held at level.  
While below, the sea is boiling with might  
To churn loose the silt, to grab, to bevel.

On such nights, to be at the water's brim  
Requires stepping backward quite steadily—  
Now the sea is moved by a savage whim,  
Rising on the beach with ferocity.

One thinks then of maidens left to the tide,  
Their long hair tied to seaweed on the rocks;  
And one thinks, if the sea won't be denied—  
Just when will the land succumb to these shocks?

The Second Partition was left to chance,  
Not bound by any ordinance of Jove's:  
No law limits the sea's hungry advance  
As she feeds, in even the quiet coves.

— *Lynn Hagman*

## At your throat

Did you see the way  
    she walked right by you,  
    like you weren't even there?  
There's something about the whole  
    thing you didn't tell me, my friend

— *Peter Moore*

## Radio Rune

I tried tuning you in the other night  
on my radio, FM of course  
The selector hit upon some waves I thought were you  
but turned out to be  
    roller skate keys  
    honeybees  
    old-fashioned love songs  
    all I ever need's you's  
    winter of '65 drives  
    baby I'm yours's  
but you were there, hidden in them,  
bringing the flood and  
moving me to re and re and re-assure you  
that what flows in me becomes part of you  
forever, never emptying

— *Claudia Stephens*

## Was Thoreau a Male Chauvinist?

Henry David Thoreau is generally regarded as one of America's greatest writers and thinkers by both cultural leaders and literary critics. Yet this paragon, like many lesser men, was not entirely without faults. Even his most universally admired book, *Walden*, though fully deserving the praise that has been lavished upon it as one of the undoubted classics of American literature, contains considerable evidence that Thoreau was a male chauvinist.

One could argue that since he died over one hundred years ago, Thoreau cannot be held accountable to people existing today or to present-day attitudes. Yet his ideas in areas such as civil rights, specifically in his essay "Civil Disobedience," affected current history. This essay influenced Gandhi, who influenced Martin Luther King, who in turn influenced a whole generation of people. Thoreau the philosopher was indeed sensitive to the civil rights movement of his day, and as a consequence, his genius reached out into our century and helped improve the quality of our lives. One can only wish Thoreau had been as sensitive to the values of another conspicuously active movement of his day, the women's rights movement. However, Thoreau did *not* exhibit any interest in this movement. In *Walden*, particularly, he hardly discusses any specific women. Of those mentioned the following are typical.

James Collins the Irishman's wife is mentioned. So is John Field the Irishman's wife, who cooked

many successive dinners in the recess of that lofty stove; with round greasy face and bare breast, still thinking to improve her condition someday; with the never absent mop in one hand, and yet no effects of it visible anywhere.

Also mentioned is Zilpha, a former inhabitant of the area whose house was burned by the British during the War of 1812. But quite incidentally, as if the house mattered more.

Most outstanding was Mrs. Hollowell whose husband sold Thoreau the Hollowell farm, but before he gave Thoreau the deed, "his wife—every man has such a wife—changed her mind and wished to keep it." Mr. Hollowell offered \$10.00 to be released from the agreement, but Thoreau "to be generous" allowed him to keep his farm and his \$10.00.

These women Thoreau specifically describes were other men's wives or inaccessible in other ways—nor do they seem particularly appealing to Thoreau.

Thoreau does mention that visitors who had rarely come to the woods visited him, including some women. One assumes these visitors were his friends from town, most likely educated friends. Thoreau writes that among his visitors, girls, boys, and young women most appreciated the woods and pond and benefited most from these visits in the woods. None of these women are mentioned by name or described, whereas three men, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Amos Bronson Alcott, and William Ellery Channing, are. Obviously none of the women visitors made as great an impression on Thoreau as did Mrs. Field or Mrs. Hollowell.

Thoreau does discuss women in the abstract. He seems to have two prevailing views of women.

The first view is of woman as the symbol of nature, or Mother Earth. Woman as the supreme fertility symbol and nurturer.

Throughout the book he refers to Nature—always capitalized like a proper name—as a woman. “Nature herself,” “When Nature made him, she . . .,” a . . . “promise of Nature to rear her children and feed them.” Thoreau refers to Nature as the mother of humanity, and so on throughout the book.

Thoreau discusses the “elderly dame” with the herb garden who “has a genius of unequalled fertility.” Two paragraphs later he writes that the “pill which will keep us well, serene, contented . . . is our own great grandmother Nature’s universal, vegetable, botanic medicines . . . which she used to keep herself young always and to feed her health . . .”

Thoreau writes that when working in his bean-field, “they attached me to the earth, and so I got strength like Antaeus.” He also writes of the myth of the Indian hill which sank and became the pond, Walden. Only one Indian, a woman named Walden, escaped death and the pond was named after her. She, being a woman, is the symbol of fertility and symbolically gives birth to the pond.

In all these instances Thoreau uses women as symbols.

Many women object to being used as a symbol, any symbol, even a symbol of life. I believe giving and nurturing life—whether physically or spiritually—is the greatest form of creativity and thus of life. Therefore I don't strongly object to women being symbols of life.

What I do object to is Thoreau's second opinion of women—women as corrupters and destroyers of life.

In discussing clothes Thoreau nastily puns when he writes that "clothes introduced sewing, a kind of work which you may call endless; a woman's *dress* is never done" (my emphasis). In discussing fashion Thoreau writes that when he asks for a particular style of clothes his *tailoress* tells him, "They do not make them so now, as if she quoted an impersonal authority." I had not realized that tailoresses existed in the mid-nineteenth century, only that seamstresses for women did. Thoreau managed to find the rare exception.

In discussing food he mentions living on a vegetable diet and tells of a young man who experimented living on hard corn. "The human race is interested in these experiments, though a few *old women* who are incapacitated for them, or who own their thirds in mills may be alarmed" (my emphasis). "Old women" is obviously a derogatory term meant to include all people who may be alarmed by these experiments, therefore "old women" are by nature opposed to useful experiments.

Thoreau discusses the uselessness of post-offices and newspapers. "To a philosopher all news, as it is called, is gossip, and they who edit and read it are *old women* over their tea" (my emphasis). Here again "old women" is a term of insult; so is gossip, which in itself is a form of spiritual corruption. Naturally all gossips are old women, and vice versa, even if they are men. If one accepts Thoreau's statement, Horace Greeley, the influential abolitionist editor, must have been an old women.

In discussing language, Thoreau compares the spoken language, the "mother tongue," "a dialect merely, almost brutish which we learn like brutes from our mothers" to the "father tongue," which is the voice of "maturity and experience . . . a reserved and select expression, too significant to

be heard by the ear . . .” The mother tongue is the corrupter of language and the father tongue is the savior, according to Thoreau.

It is true that one of the two full-length poems quoted in *Walden*, other than those by Thoreau himself, is by a woman, Mrs. Hooper. However, this inclusion of a woman is the exception, not the rule.

In the conclusion of *Walden* Thoreau discusses GREAT MEN—not great men and women, not great people, but great men. He urges us to be explorers like Columbus, or Lewis and Clark, and to discover ourselves. Why not be like Anne Hutchinson who discovered herself and then explored and found a new place to live where she could be herself?

Aren’t there any great women in Thoreau’s mind? Or is it that women are not even worthy of consideration as total human beings—only as symbols—besides the few exceptions?

Thoreau was a man opposed to unjust laws and to inhumanity. He opposed slavery. Among the earliest and most dedicated abolitionists were Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, the Grimké sisters, and many other dedicated and articulate women. These activist women had a greater *immediate* effect on the political and social history of the United States and the world than did Thoreau the philosopher. Yet he, a native of New England—the section of the country where women always shared the burdens of life equally with men, where women were often more educated than most men in other parts of the country—could not find any great women to mention in his book, written a mere six years after the Seneca Falls Convention. He cannot even bring himself to pay tribute to his brilliant Concord neighbor and fellow-editor of *The Dial*, Margaret Fuller, a woman who was certainly as interested in literary excellence and social regeneration as he was.

I can only conclude that the sole merit Thoreau could find in women lay in their potentials as symbols, mediocre appendages to men, or corruptors and trivializers of life. And finally there are those few rare exceptions who are not like women but rather like *men*. I find it difficult to avoid the conclusion that this classic of our 19th century American prose was also a classic male chauvinist.

— Rachel Deitsch Sandman



## Mr. Johnson Let His Wife Keep the House and Children

It was an Indian Summer summer  
with woodpeckers at sunrise and  
skinny tomcats just before the milkman came.  
Remember?

It was too hot on Saturdays and  
the harvest moon was always shining on  
but we never saw it because there weren't any windows  
facing that side.

It would rain in the middle of the week,  
remember? and the birdhouse next to  
the kitchen door was full of  
sparrows.

It was Lester Montgomery from two blocks over  
that delivered the groceries fifteen cents  
a bag that Indian Summer summer and he was the one  
who told me there were suitcases in the  
station wagon.

— *Alice Tucker*

## SPRING PRIZE WINNER

### Supermarket worker

She's a lot older now, 35 or so, and single.  
One morning she woke and  
    the lines around her eyes  
    appeared as quickly as cobwebs  
    in an unused corner.  
All her childhood dreams  
    and teenage hopes  
    are carefully filed in her head  
    between the prices of canned crab  
    and chicken parts

— *Peter J. Moore*

## Paranoia

After you have made a list  
of what to be: 1) yourself and 2) right  
“to get along in this world”,  
resist everything,  
especially these waterlilies  
floating in the shade  
where you can’t quite see them  
gathering and plotting  
in a foreign language,  
almost inaudibly making these ripples  
that widen liquidly out and  
without a real death like you’ll have.

— *Alvin Fritz*

## If I Declare Myself

If I declare myself  
alive I must submit  
to the boundlessness

of Gilgamesh's dream  
that beats continuously  
in my conscience;

of Icarus' wings  
fluttering heavy within  
my breast. To be

alive is to wince  
at the muffled whines  
of a winter's icy wind.

— *Tom Peterson*

$\frac{1}{2}$

i usually  
park my car  
in the street  
& not  
in the driveway  
my step-sister  
usually  
parks her car  
in the driveway  
& not  
in the street  
things r not good  
at home  
even for  
climbing stairs  
but  
i have never  
felt more like  
a brother  
since  
she started  
parking  
her car  
in the street

— *Wally Swist*

What is as lonely  
as a gull on the shore  
broken—  
startled to be dead,  
waiting for the gluttonous tide  
to slide in  
and absorb his traces.  
Next week the gull is seawater  
consuming birds of Tahiti,  
until there are no birds,  
only ocean.

When I go  
I'll be the universe  
saturating the doomed  
with my vacuum  
until there are no oceans.

— *Tony Crocamo*

I share poetry with my friends,  
Politics with acquaintances.  
Stumbling through the yawn  
Laughter opens my eyelids for a few moments.

Listen

I worry

I fear

I see freedom and it scares me.

I'm lost in all this freedom,  
    til my friends hover around and for a  
    few minutes say, "You're home."

I have a friend.

He cannot have fun.

He's worried about his morals.

Freedom is not an objective political reality,

Either you feel it wrestling, nestling,

Or you don't.

— *Linda Mandeville*



## To the Sirens

Set beside the sea  
Gentle sister  
Grafted to an island  
Sunbloomed fruit  
On swaying fingers.

So fine in temper  
This maid  
Has no use for heroes  
And as her climate dictates  
Circe is worshipped  
And the gelding knife  
A boon to every home.

Be the anchor sweet sister  
To hold your island still.  
No song allowed but only sighs  
Of siren magic. . .  
Until you drug the very waves  
To death.

— *Ruggiero*

## Excerpts from the Unpublished Journals of Colin Wilson



*Due to the efforts of former UNH student John Perry, the University of New Haven Library has obtained permission to reproduce the private journals of the famous English writer, Colin Wilson, author of *The Outsider* and *Ritual in the Dark*. Restricted access to this fascinating and important literary document will be granted to serious scholars as soon as it has been reproduced by the library. The following are two brief entries for the Spring of 1959, published here by permission of the author.*

22nd April Wednesday

I was reading [Graham] Green[e]'s *Heart of the Matter* last night, and it helps me to pinpoint the problem that occupies me as I finish this novel [*Ritual in the Dark*]. I know the 'universe of pity' too well. But where I find myself revolting against Greene's world is in his failure to realize that life is irrational at bottom. He keeps asking if God loves men, etc. and talking about the sufferings of children. Yet it seems to me that the thing Van Gogh and Nijinsky realized was that the universe is simultaneously unspeakably beautiful and terrible. And this paradox is its glory. This is what I must say at the end of the novel. The Hindu's [sic] express this in Kali, while the Christians fail completely.

Again, in the sexual orgasm, one learns the paradoxical truth that one is a god and beyond accident. And yet a man's life can be anything but godlike. One knows suddenly that one is simultaneously to be made to suffer and is above suffering. I feel that the mind of God is like a powerful magnifying glass that can allow him to laugh at what human beings call suffering. Just as an adult laughs when a child gets into a state because of a quarrel with a friend. And for a moment, in the orgasm, one's mind becomes the magnifying glass. The will intensifies.

That is where I disagree with Greene. That states of mind that are the 'données' of his work all have the same lack of intensity. As soon as you get behind the eyes of a Greene character, the world goes dull, and trivialities occupy the vision. And the trivialities—I know them too. Petty spite, the minor worry—the letter from one's bank manager, etc. (we are just moving into this new house, and have perpetual financial worry). But there is nothing for it but to dismiss them and deliberately accelerate on will-power, turn to bigger projects. There is no point whatever in letting the world beat you to your knees as far as it seems to have been beaten Greene.

Monday May 4

The Problem of prehension. I sometimes wonder if, as Nietzsche said, prehension ought to be infinite—an infinite zest and will power. Certainly, the patterns of everyday events are puzzling: ought one to play them as a stock-broker plays the market? Or simply refuse to be beaten, and keep hurling in more vital energy in the certainty the tide will turn? Certainly, to be beaten is stupid; no one has any excuse for ultimate defeat.

For the past week I've been working well on the last chapters of *Ritual [in the Dark]*—David Bolt wants it quickly—and feeling rather zestful and optimistic about Fanny. Not out of any particular designs on her, but because she reminds me that a large slice of existence is sheer magic. As one gets older, one gets so used to gritting one[']s teeth and treating life as a boring ordeal, and it[']s good to be reminded [o]f its loveliness. Now me, for instance. This morning, \_\_\_\_\_ was, for some reason, in a gloomy tearful mood, and wanted to know if I really wanted her to move into the new place. (We move this Friday). I don't know why. Then I got a letter from \_\_\_\_\_ saying No, she can't pay \_\_\_\_\_'s school fees, she's stoney broke. (I'm afraid \_\_\_\_\_ has always treated life as something to be feared, & life has retaliated by giving her blow after blow). Then \_\_\_\_\_ wrote from Chicago Univ. saying that \_\_\_\_\_ has recently been slandering me there and claiming that no one will publish me in England now. And dad got into a bad mood

because \_\_\_\_\_ kept dithering around when he wanted to go out—she was doing her usual delaying act, and it lasted over an hour. And my bank manager wrote to ask me how about my £200 overdraft. Yet it is a superb day, and I've done several days good work on the novel, and I decline to be depressed. But it does lead me to the question of the cussedness of chance, and the way that some days everything goes right and some days everything goes wrong. But that is the whole aim of writing, for me: to overcome these ups and downs. To achieve liberation, a Hindu would say.

I suppose the basis of all mysticism is that knowledge that *life gives*. And the basis of all pessimism is the fear that life only takes away. But the really great—Goethe, Shaw, Yea[t]s—knew that it gives. This is the meaning behind the work of D. H. Lawrence. Lying in the sun the other day, I understood his story *Sun* (as bad as it is); the sun also gives. Someone like \_\_\_\_\_ has such superb vitality because he believes life gives, not robs. A woman finds this hard to accept; that is why Blake spoke of 'female thinking.'

Busy is the time went

## Spent to buy a past—some good, some bad

some wished, some had

And it really won't come back. In spite of all the care

We give to memories, they just don't last

They change and grow and lose their clean edge

They blend and swirl and trade places.

And time keeps going to the back of the bus

And sneaking out before we're ready to stop.

—Robert G. Finley

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A noiseless patient spider,  
I mark'd where on a little promontory it stood  
isolated,  
Mark'd how to explore the vacant vast  
surrounding,  
It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament,  
out of itself,  
Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding  
them.

And you O my soul where you stand,  
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans  
of space,  
Carelessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking  
the spheres to connect them,  
Till the bridge you will need be form'd, till the  
ductile anchor hold,  
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch  
somewhere, O my soul.

Walt Whitman